

2 Park System Planning

Park planning helps define what types of resource conditions, visitor uses, and management actions will best achieve the mandate to preserve resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. NPS planning processes will flow from broad-scale general management planning, through progressively more specific strategic planning, implementation planning, and annual performance planning and reporting.

2.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The National Park Service will use planning to bring logic, analysis, public involvement, and accountability into the decision-making process. Park planning and decision-making will be conducted as a continuous, dynamic process that extends from broad visions shared with the public to individual, annual work assignments and evaluations. Each park will be able to demonstrate to decision-makers, staff, and the public how decisions relate to one another in terms of a logical, trackable rationale.

Planning decisions regarding the treatment and use of park resources will be based on scientific, technical, and scholarly analyses. Analysis will be tiered, focusing first on the park as a whole (including its global, national, and regional contexts) and then on site-specific details. At key points of planning and decision-making, the Park Service will identify reasonable alternatives, and will analyze and compare their differences with respect to their consistency with the park purpose, the quality of visitor experiences, the impacts on park resources, short- and long-term costs, and environmental consequences that may extend beyond park boundaries.

Public participation in planning and decision-making will ensure that the Park Service fully understands and considers the public's interests in the parks as part of their national heritage, cultural traditions, and community surroundings. The Service will actively seek out and consult with existing and potential visitors, neighbors, people with traditional cultural ties to park lands, scientists and scholars, concessioners, cooperating associations, gateway communities, other partners, and government agencies. The Service will work cooperatively with others to improve the condition of parks; to enhance public service; and to integrate parks into sustainable ecological, cultural, and socioeconomic systems.

Managers will be held accountable for identifying and accomplishing long-term goals and annual goals as incremental steps toward fully carrying out the park mission. Such planning will be a critical and essential part of the National Park Service performance management system that is designed to improve the agency's performance and results.

2.2 MAJOR ELEMENTS OF NPS PARK PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING

A logical, trackable rationale for decisions will be created through several levels of planning, which become increasingly detailed and complementary, by agreeing first on why the park was established and what resource conditions and visitor experiences should exist there, and then by becoming increasingly

focused on how those conditions should be achieved. More specifically, park managers and staffs will be able to articulate and share with the public:

- A clear statement of the park's *mission* (based on legislation, or Presidential proclamations or orders, that apply to the National Park System or to the individual park unit) and the broad, park-wide *mission goals*;
- Specific *management prescriptions* for each particular area of the park, including desired resource conditions and visitor experiences and statements about the appropriate kinds and levels of management, visitor use, and development for each prescription;
- Specific, measurable, five-year *long-term goals* for which the park will be accountable in the foreseeable future, based on a *resource assessment* of conditions, capabilities, and needs in a strategic plan;
- An *implementation program* and *implementation details* (where appropriate) describing what actions are needed for achieving the mission and long-term goals, and specifically how they will be conducted;
- An annual performance plan, consisting of *annual goals* and an *annual work plan* that will direct park efforts over the upcoming fiscal year; and
- An annual performance report, consisting of an accounting of *annual results* in relation to the annual goals.

Each of these elements will be interrelated in a single framework for planning and decision-making. Within this framework, actions will relate directly to a goal, and goals will relate directly to the mission of the park. Similarly, annual goals and work plans will relate to long-term (five-year) goals, while long-term goals will relate to the broadest decisions about what the Service hopes ultimately to achieve.

The Park Service recognizes that many parks will initially lack some elements of a logical, trackable rationale as described here, and that updating plans to bring them into conformance will take time. In the interim, parks will work on the basis of information in their current approved plans, and identify and fill gaps in the overall framework as quickly as is feasible.

2.3 PARK PLANNING PROCESSES

The elements necessary for a logical, trackable rationale for decision-making will be created and updated through four closely interrelated planning processes: general management planning, park strategic planning, implementation planning, and annual performance planning. The order of these processes will generally flow from broad-scale general management planning through progressively more specific strategic planning, implementation planning, and annual performance planning and reporting. When

determining a plan's scope, it will be important to distinguish which issues can most appropriately be addressed by general management planning and which will be most appropriately addressed by more detailed strategic or implementation planning. The results of planning and decision-making will be monitored by the park staff, and information will be fed back into the processes at appropriate junctures. If goals are not being met, management teams will seek to understand why, and identify appropriate actions for moving closer to goals. Occasionally, the broadest level decisions about ultimate goals will be reassessed to reflect new knowledge or previously unforeseen circumstances, and then the cycle will resume.

Each process will have its own particular requirements; however, to the maximum extent possible, these processes will accommodate the overarching goal of minimizing duplication and confusion in park planning. This will be accomplished by establishing uniform definitions for decision-making elements shared by more than one process, and by explaining how all the elements interrelate in a single park planning and decision-making framework.

Elements that were previously included in other planning processes (such as the statement for management) are now included in the four NPS park planning processes described below.

2.3.1 General Management Planning

The National Park Service will maintain an up-to-date general management plan (GMP) for each unit of the national park system. The purpose of this plan will be to ensure that each park has a clearly defined direction for resource preservation and visitor use. This basic foundation for decision-making will be developed in consultation with Service-wide program managers, interested parties, and the general public. It will be based on an adequate analysis of existing and potential resource conditions and visitor experiences, environmental (including natural, cultural, and socioeconomic) impacts, and costs of alternative courses of action.

General management planning will constitute the first phase of tiered planning and decision-making. It will focus on why the park was established and what resource conditions and visitor experiences should be achieved and maintained over time. The general management plan will take the long view, which may be many years into the future, when dealing with the time-frames of natural and cultural processes. The plan will consider the park holistically (in its full ecological and cultural contexts) as a unit of the national park system and as part of a surrounding region. It will identify the importance of partnerships with others in protecting park resources and providing appropriate visitor services. The general management plan will also identify connections among the various park programs and park management districts. This will help avoid inadvertently creating new problems in one area while attempting to solve problems in another. Decisions about site-specific actions will be deferred to implementation planning. More detailed, site-specific analyses of implementation plan alternatives will be required before any action is undertaken.

General management plans will contain the following decision-making elements: mission, mission goals, and management prescriptions. The management prescriptions will meet all statutory requirements of

GMPs contained in 16 USC 1a-7(b), and will include:

- Measures (the types of management actions required) for the preservation of park resources;
- Indications of types and general intensities of development (including visitor circulation and transportation patterns, systems and modes) associated with public enjoyment and use of the area, including general locations, timing of implementation, and anticipated costs;
- Identification of, and implementation commitments for, visitor carrying capacities for all areas of the park; and
- Indications of potential boundary modifications to the external boundaries of the park, and the reasons for those proposed changes.

General management planning will be conducted by an interdisciplinary team, including park managers and technical experts, who will consult with other knowledgeable persons inside and outside the agency and with the general public. Decisions documented in GMP's and other planning products will be based on current scientific and scholarly understanding of park ecosystems and cultural contexts (both internal and external to park boundaries). The collection and analysis of information about park resources will be a continuous process that will help assure that decisions are consistent with park purposes.

During general management planning, resource values and land uses will be systematically analyzed using the best information available, and alternatives and their impacts will be rigorously explored. Planning teams will consult with park staff, Service leadership, other agencies with jurisdiction by virtue of law or expertise, and the public in reaching decisions concerning future management of park resources

Potential national wild, scenic, and recreational rivers, and potential national trails, will be considered in planning for the use and development of water and related land resources. The Service will compile a complete listing of all rivers and river segments in the national park system that it considers eligible for the national wild and scenic rivers system. GMPs and other plans potentially affecting river resources will propose no actions that could adversely affect the values that qualify a river for the national wild and scenic rivers system. A determination of eligibility will not necessarily mean that the Service will seek designation, which requires legislation. A decision concerning whether or not to seek designation will be made through a GMP, or an amendment to an existing GMP, and the legislative review process.

The analysis of GMP alternatives will meet the program standards for NPS implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and related legislation, including the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). An environmental impact statement (EIS) will be prepared for general management plans. In a few cases, after completion of scoping, and when the initial analysis of alternatives and impacts clearly indicates that there is no potential for significant impact by any alternative, an exception to the general rule may be made by the Associate Director, Natural Resources Stewardship and Science, after consultation with the Environmental Quality Division. Where NEPA and sections 106

and 110 of NHPA (16 USC 470f and 470h-2, respectively) both apply, NEPA procedures will be used to inform the public about undertakings having the potential to affect properties listed on, or eligible for listing on, the National Register of Historic Places, consistent with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulatory provisions governing coordination with NEPA, and the NPS nationwide Programmatic Agreement on section 106 compliance.

Public involvement will provide information about the concerns, issues, expectations, and values of existing and potential visitors, park neighbors, people with traditional cultural ties to lands within the park, concessionaires, cooperating associations, other partners, scientists and scholars, and other government agencies. Through public involvement, the Park Service will share information about the planning process, issues, and proposed management actions; learn about the values placed by other people and groups on the same resources and visitor experiences; and build support for implementing the plan among local publics, visitors, Congress, and others.

General management planning will be conducted as part of cooperative regional planning, and ecosystem planning, whenever possible. NPS participation in cooperative regional planning will be undertaken with the hope of better coordinating and focusing the independent and autonomous efforts of multiple parties. Service participation in such planning efforts will acknowledge the rights and interests of other landowners. While being consistent with NPS management policies and park goals, plans will identify and consider potential effects outside, as well as inside, park boundaries, and will identify ways to enhance beneficial effects and mitigate adverse effects to the maximum extent possible.

General management plans will be reviewed and amended, revised, or a new plan prepared, as necessary to keep them current. Such reviews may be needed every 10 to 15 years, or sooner if conditions change more rapidly. Even in parks with strong traditions and entrenched patterns of use and development, decision-makers will benefit from occasionally stepping back and reassessing their overall goals, particularly if resources are threatened, sites are crowded, or the park's built environment requires extensive rehabilitation or maintenance. This will give everyone with a major stake in the park an opportunity to revalidate the park's role in the nation and in the region, and to reconfirm that the kinds of resource conditions and visitor experiences being pursued are the best possible mix for the future. An approved general management plan may be amended or revised, rather than preparing a new plan, if conditions and management prescriptions governing most of the plan area remain essentially unchanged from those present when the plan was originally approved. A revision deals with two or more issues that need to be addressed together while an amendment deals with a single issue.

(See Chapter 3: Land Protection, Chapter 4: Natural Resource Management, Chapter 5: Cultural Resource Management, Chapter 6: Wilderness Preservation and Management, Chapter 8: Use of the Parks, Chapter 9: Park Facilities, Chapter 10: Commercial Visitor Services; see also Director's Order #2: Park Planning, Director's Order #12: Conservation Planning and Environmental Impact Analysis)

2.3.2 Strategic Planning

Strategic planning, required by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), will be conducted for the National Park Service as a whole, and every park, program, and central office will have

its own strategic plan. Parks, programs, and central offices will engage in strategic planning as a way to manage overall performance, and to thus achieve better results in their mission of protecting resources and providing for visitor enjoyment. Performance management is a way in which to measure real progress (outcomes) and the level of accomplishment related to specific park, program, or central office goals.

To fulfill the purposes of implementing GPRA in the NPS, strategic plans will contain the following elements to aid in decision-making: mission, mission goals, long-term goals, and resource assessment. Park strategic plans will be based on the Service-wide strategic plan, incorporating and reporting on the progress made toward meeting the Service-wide mission goals and long-term goals. Park-specific goals may be added to make the plans as useful and usable as possible at the park level. Strategic plans should address both Service-wide and local outcomes.

Park strategic plans will be developed according to the eight-step performance management process developed by the Park Service for compliance with GPRA. At the park strategic planning level, analysis will be focused on understanding the park's capability to set and meet long-term goals through a resource assessment of its fiscal and human resources. This resource assessment will also include a description of the condition of the natural and cultural resources in the park and the condition (capability) of the park's infrastructure in meeting long-term goals. Managers will consider how the park mission and long-term goals might be pursued in the foreseeable future, and the answers to that question will determine the park's workload, budget, and staffing allocations for the next two to five years.

Park strategic plans will contain all of the components required by GPRA, including:

- A description of the operational processes and resources required to meet the goals;
- An identification of key factors external to the park and beyond its control that could significantly affect the achievement of general goals; and
- A description of program evaluations used in establishing or revising goals; and a record of consultation.

Because information in park strategic plans is extracted for compilation into the Service-wide strategic plan, these plans need to contain similar information.

Generally, the park strategic plan will follow the general management plan, building on the GMP mission, mission goals, and management prescriptions, and rewriting them to be stated as outcomes, if necessary. Parks that lack a current general management plan upon which to base their initial GPRA strategic planning effort will work from the information in their existing plans, and identify and fill gaps in their overall planning framework as quickly as is feasible.

Although it shares some elements in common with a general management plan, a park strategic plan will not be a substitute for a general management plan because it does not reflect the comprehensive resource

analysis, consultation, and compliance required for a general management plan. Through strategic planning, park staffs will continuously reevaluate the adequacy of the park's general management plan as a foundation for addressing issues, and they may identify the need for a new or revised general management plan. Should a park decide, through its strategic planning process, that a major shift in direction or emphasis is needed, then the strategic plan will identify the need for a new general management plan or a GMP addendum or amendment. Strategic plans may also identify the need for more detailed implementation plans. General management planning and implementation planning are the appropriate processes for incorporating the requirements of NEPA and NHPA to consider impacts on the natural, cultural, and socioeconomic environments.

(See Government Performance and Results Act 1.6.2)

2.3.3 Implementation Planning

Implementation planning focuses on how to implement an activity or project needed to achieve a long-term goal. The contents of implementation plans may vary widely, depending upon whether the plan is directing a specific project (such as reintroducing an extirpated species or developing a trail) or an ongoing activity (such as maintaining a historic structure, managing fire within a natural system, or setting and maintaining a standard for a quality visitor experience). Developing a plan of action for dealing with a complex and sometimes controversial issue often requires a level of detail and thorough analysis that goes well beyond that which is appropriate at the general management planning or strategic planning levels. Examples of implementation plans include resource management plans, visitor use plans, site development or development concept plans, wilderness management plans, and backcountry plans.

Implementation planning will generally be deferred until the activity or project under consideration has sufficient priority to indicate that action will be taken within the next two to five years. Therefore, implementation planning will usually tier off of one of the long-term goals identified in the park strategic plan, and it will analyze and describe how the long-term goal will be achieved. Deferring implementation planning until the action has been given sufficient priority to anticipate funding in the next two to five years will help ensure that decisions about how to best achieve a certain goal are relevant, timely, and based on current data.

Implementation plans for actions with the potential to significantly affect the human environment will require a formal analysis of alternatives in compliance with NEPA and related legislation, including NHPA. Because many issues involving environmental quality and cultural resources will be resolved through implementation planning rather than general management planning, the NEPA and NHPA section 106 processes begun during general management planning will need to continue as part of implementation planning.

Implementation planning for one or more projects or activities may overlap general management planning and strategic planning if appropriate for the purposes of planning efficiency or public involvement. However, the decisions needed at the general management planning level and the strategic planning level will precede and direct more detailed decisions about projects and activities. Major actions or

commitments aimed at changing resource conditions or visitor use in a park, and major new development or rehabilitation, will be consistent with an approved general management plan, and will be linked to a long-term goal in a current strategic plan. Even if they are conducted simultaneously, the general management plan and implementation plan(s) will be contained in separate documents or separate parts of a single document, because the general management plan needs to remain intact after the implementation plans are out of date and no longer needed for reference.

(See also Director's Order #12: Conservation Planning and Environmental Impact Analysis)

2.3.4 Park Annual Performance Planning and Annual Performance Reporting

Each park will prepare annual performance plans articulating annual goals for the upcoming fiscal year and annual performance reports describing the progress made in meeting the annual goals.

Annual performance plans will contain the following elements to aid in decision-making: (1) annual goals (the outcomes expected to be achieved that fiscal year), which are tiered from, and represent one-year increments of, the park's long-term goals; and (2) an annual work plan (inputs and outputs for the fiscal year) that breaks out park activities to achieve the annual goals, and includes FTEs and funds. Because they incorporate decisions made through other planning processes, annual plans do not require public involvement or consultation, but they must be made available to the public.

Annual performance reports will consist of two main parts: (1) a report on the progress made toward meeting the last fiscal year's annual performance plan; and (2) an analysis of the present fiscal year's annual performance plan. The analysis will identify the continuing goals (carry-overs) from the last fiscal year, and discuss why the park did not accomplish one or more of its annual goals in the past fiscal year. The park annual performance report will relate to the Service-wide annual performance report where applicable, in order to aggregate park results at the Service-wide level.

The development of the annual performance plan and report will be synchronized with NPS budget development. The annual performance report will specifically address park performance affected by budget change. Annual performance reports will also be used as the basis of personnel appraisals. Accountability for results should be within an employee's ability to effect results.

(See Government Performance and Results Act 1.8.2)